

SAHEL FOOD SYSTEMS

Media *Lab*

2026

COMMUNIQUE





Introduction

The most consequential food systems stories don't look like food systems stories at all.

A story about insecurity is also a story about food security. A breakdown in infrastructure can determine whether food reaches markets and at what cost. A nutrition challenge can expose gaps across food production, markets, healthcare and livelihoods.

These connections matter because food systems are shaped by the interaction of multiple forces. When reported in isolation, immediate events are captured without fully explaining what drives them, who is affected and why the problem persists.

This is where journalism has a critical role to play, helping audiences to see beyond the story and understand the system

Recognising the media's role in strengthening public understanding of these connections, we convened the 2026 Sahel Food Systems Media Lab in partnership with the Centre for Journalism Innovation and Development (CJID), HumAngle Foundation, and Social Voices.

Over two days, journalists and media practitioners examined how systems thinking, evidence, solutions journalism and conflict-sensitive reporting strengthens investigation and reporting of food systems issues.

To ultimately produce stories that are more relevant, nuanced and balanced, from a systems lens.

This communiqué is a resource for journalists reporting on Nigeria's food systems. It captures practical lessons and questions that emerged from the Media Lab.



Why We Convened the Media Lab

The stories we tell influence how people understand public issues, where attention is directed and what questions receive sustained scrutiny.

The issues affecting how food is produced, distributed and consumed extend across agriculture, climate, nutrition, markets, infrastructure, finance, governance and security. Reporting them well therefore requires journalists to look beyond individual events and examine the connections between them.

The Media Lab creates a space for journalists and media practitioners to strengthen their understanding of food systems while developing practical approaches to data journalism, solutions journalism, conflict-sensitive reporting and evidence-based storytelling.

At the heart of the Media Lab is a practical proposition:

Why Systems Lens?

Many food systems stories begin with an event that appears straightforward. The deeper story often lies in what caused it, who is affected and what happens next.

This was the starting point for the opening session, facilitated by Ntiedo Ekott Edet, Project Officer (Agriculture) at the Centre for Journalism Innovation and Development (CJID). He challenged participants to look beyond agriculture alone and examine the wider systems influencing Nigeria's food realities.

"Food systems are not just an agricultural issue," he noted.

Using the four pillars of food security, availability, access, utilisation and stability, Ntiedo explored how climate change, insecurity, financing, infrastructure and post-harvest losses influence food outcomes.

Why Food Systems Require a Systems Lens

The discussion pushed participants beyond reporting visible events and towards investigating what sits behind them.

What happens before food reaches the market? Who is affected when food systems fail? Where are the gaps between policy commitments and realities on the ground?

The implication for journalists is important. What appears to be an agricultural story may also be a story about livelihoods, security, governance and food access.

Participants were therefore encouraged to speak directly with affected communities, examine what has changed, understand who benefits or loses, and connect the story to the policies influencing those realities.

The session closed with a practical reminder:

“

To get a stronger story, you must connect to the policy that talks about that issue.

”



Why Evidence Matters

Seeing the connections within a food system is only the beginning. Reporting those connections credibly requires evidence.

This principle featured prominently in the session on solutions journalism, facilitated by Seun Durojaiye, Founding Editor at Social Voices. She challenged participants to reconsider what makes a story worth pursuing, noting that important food systems stories can receive limited attention because they fall outside conventional ideas of newsworthiness.

Stories about responses to complex problems, implementation gaps and community-led innovations can therefore remain underreported.

Seun encouraged participants to move beyond simply identifying problems and investigate how individuals, communities and institutions are responding to them.

“We have to first cover the problem before telling us the solution.”

Why Evidence Matters

Solutions journalism, she explained, is neither advocacy nor positive storytelling. It requires journalists to examine whether a response is working, who is benefiting, what evidence supports the reported outcomes and where limitations remain.

"Solutions journalism is rigorous, evidence-based reporting."

To get accurate evidence, journalists need to engage directly with affected communities and not rely solely on official announcements or institutional reports. Communities may hold perspectives and evidence that are absent from formal documents.



Why Context Cannot Be Optional



“

*Food is the
oxygen of life.*

Ibrahim Adeyemi, Investigative Editor at HumAngle Foundation, led a session examining the relationship between conflict, food systems and journalism.

He challenged participants to look beyond food insecurity as simply an outcome of conflict and examine how food itself can become a means of control and coercion.

The session explored how insecurity can prevent farmers from accessing their land, leaving areas uncultivated and affecting production, livelihoods and markets.

Why Context Cannot Be Optional



Ibrahim further noted:

“Food insecurity is not just a casualty of war; it is routinely weaponised as an instrument of control, coercion, and forced displacement.”

For journalists, this demands more than reporting what happened. It requires understanding the circumstances surrounding an event, the people affected and the wider consequences.

The session also considered journalism’s responsibility to preserve a reliable public record.

“The story we write today is what becomes our history.”

That responsibility places a premium on accuracy, fairness and context, particularly when reporting issues that affect vulnerable communities.

The broader lesson was clear: context does not make a story less compelling. It helps the audience understand why the story matters.

From Knowledge To Practice

The second day moved the Media Lab from principles to practice.

Zainab, recipient of the 2025 Sahel Food Systems Media Lab reporting grant, shared her experience reporting on child malnutrition in Jigawa State. Her session gave participants a practical account of what reporting from communities can require.

She spoke about navigating unfamiliar communities, language barriers and difficult

terrain, as well as the importance of earning trust and allowing communities to inform how their stories are told.

Her experience reinforced a practical lesson: good reporting begins with listening.

Zainab also highlighted how limited access to knowledge and information can affect livelihoods, particularly for women, while discussing interventions supporting improved production and nutrition outcomes.

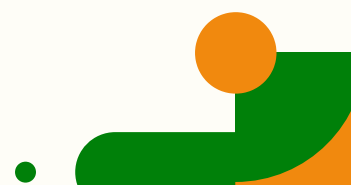


The final technical session, “Writing Stories That Matter,” was led by Ibrahim. Participants were encouraged to think beyond gathering information and consider what makes an audience care about a story.

Ibrahim introduced a practical framework built around identifying the hero, the villain, the problem and, most importantly, why the audience should care.

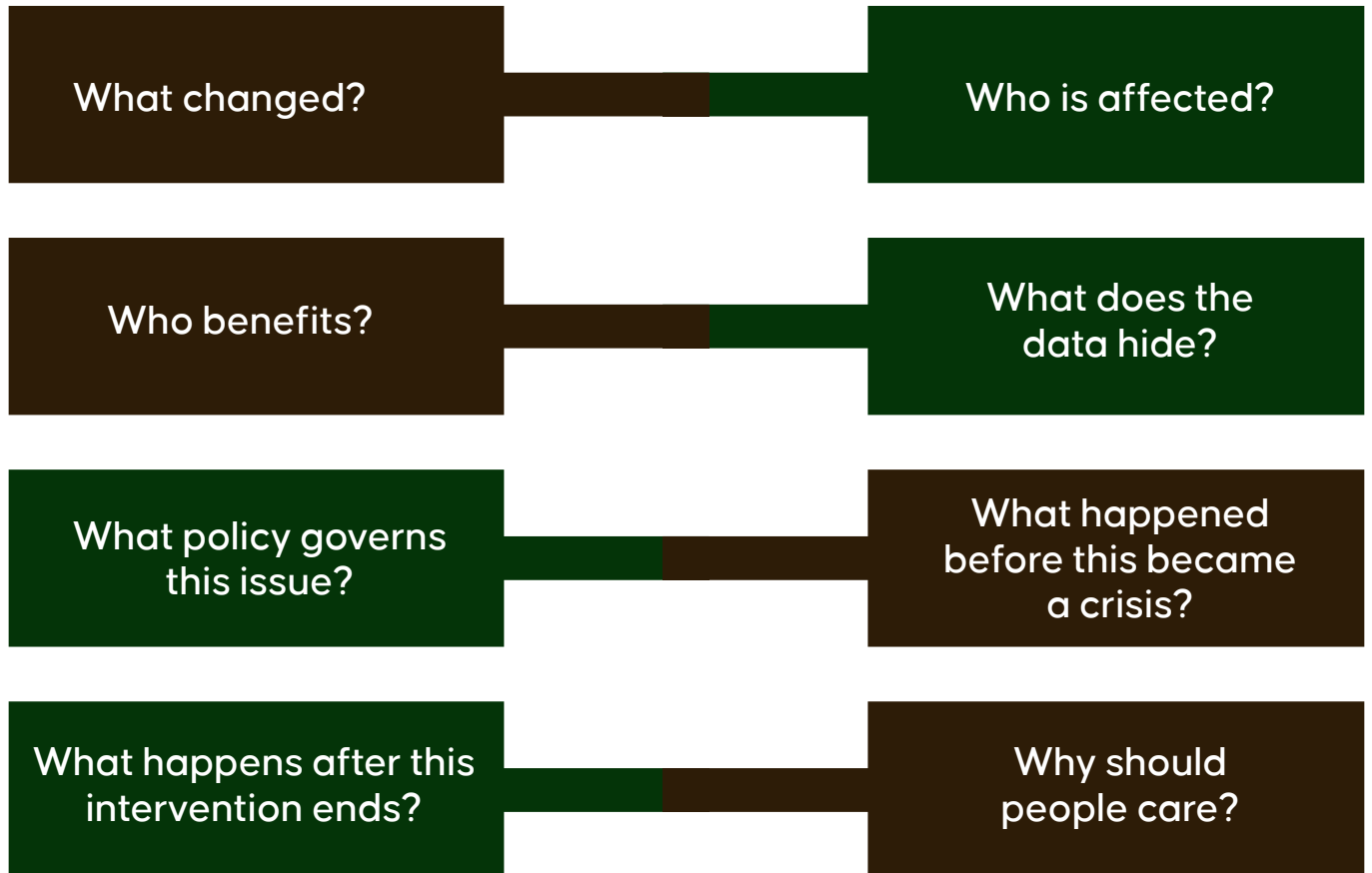
He also encouraged participants to look for fresh angles within familiar issues rather than reproducing narratives audiences have encountered repeatedly.

The Media Lab concluded with participants presenting their own story ideas for peer review and facilitator feedback, giving them an opportunity to apply the principles discussed during the programme

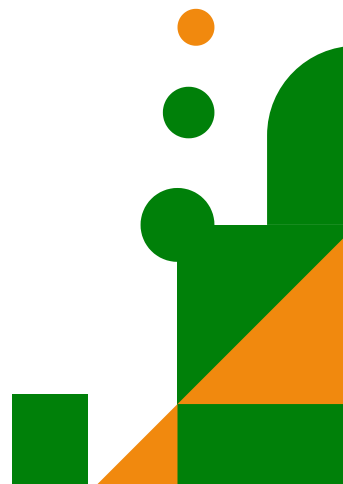


Questions Worth Asking

One of the most practical lessons from the Media Lab was that stronger stories often begin with stronger questions. For journalists reporting on food systems, these provide a useful starting point:



These questions can help move reporting from describing what happened to examining why it happened, what it means and what should be understood next.





Journalist Checklist

- ☐ Did I verify my data?
- ☐ Did I connect the story to policy?
- ☐ Did I identify who benefits?
- ☐ Did I speak to the affected communities?
- ☐ Did I include evidence?
- ☐ Did I explore possible solutions?
- ☐ Did I explain why readers should care?
- ☐ Did I tell the whole story?



Participants' Feedback



ABI INALEGWU

Advocacy Programmes Producer, Federal Radio Corporation of Nigeria

The Media lab broadened my understanding of food system, and the critical role journalism plays in shaping public conversation around food security.

ENE OSHAWA C.

Senior Reporter, Guardian Newspapers

One session that was most valuable to me was finding the story in food system data. It enlightened me about hidden stories I never imagined before.



MARYAM AMINU

Correspondence, Africa Security Investigation News

As a result of the media lab I feel more confident to report food system issues with greater context.

NUHU BASHIR MASA

Journalist, Blueprint Radio Abuja

I was particularly inspired by the facilitators in how they engaged the participants by making it so lively and interactive.



MUHAMMED JOSHUA

News correspondent, Advocate Broadcasting Network

As a result of the Media Lab, I plan to pay more attention to human-centric, rural-area stories.

SHEREEFDEEN AHMAD

Reporter, The Liberalist Guardian Newspapers

I have learnt a lot about agricultural reporting, and I'm very confident to now identify stories on food production.



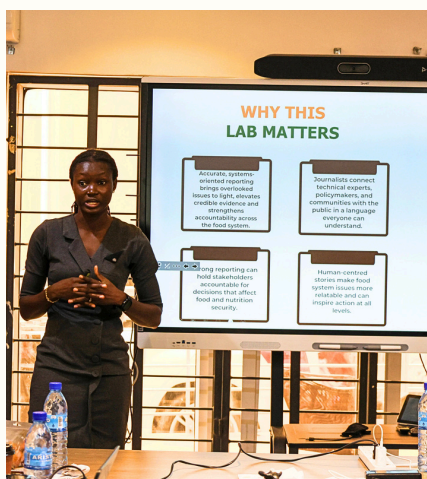
Conclusion

The two-day Media Lab ends with a clear takeaway: strong food systems journalism begins with looking beyond the obvious.

Participants leave with practical approaches for following evidence, connecting events to the systems and policies behind them, and bringing the experiences of affected communities into sharper focus.

The work now moves beyond the Lab, to the stories journalists will pursue, the questions they will ask, and the evidence they will bring to public attention.

At Sahel Consulting, we remain committed to creating opportunities that strengthen informed public discourse on Nigeria's food systems and support journalists in pursuing the stories that deserve deeper examination.



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